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Tragedy at Skyline—September 17, 1967: One Who Was There Investigates

David Govatski

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One who was there investigates

David Govatski

Fifty years after the worst accident in the history of New Hampshire's White Mountains, I went looking for the reason it happened. I remember September 17, 1967, very well. Eight people died, and more than 70 were hurt. The engine and a car of the popular Cog Railway derailed high on Mount Washington, at a spot called Skyline Switch. I worked that year on the crew at the Appalachian Mountain Club's Pinkham Notch Camp (as it was called then), in the valley, and I was sent up to rescue people from the wreckage. I have always wanted to understand what really happened. Last year, I pursued as many former railway workers and witnesses as I could find.

This is the story of the people I tracked down and the details of what probably caused such a horrific accident. We'll never know for certain what went through the minds of everyone on that awful evening.

The Witnesses

William "Bill" Arnold was the AMC assistant hutmaster at Pinkham Notch Camp and a member of the rescue team.

Greg Gordon was a new observer at the Mount Washington Observatory and the second person on the accident scene.

Peter Carter was riding in the engine as an off-duty Cog Railway brakeman.

Jack Middleton was the lawyer for the Cog Railway from 1962 to 1968.

The Background

The Mount Washington Cog Railway is the oldest mountain-climbing railroad in the world; construction started just after the end of the Civil War in 1866 and reached the summit on July 4, 1869. The railway was the idea of Sylvester Marsh, an inventor and native of Campton, New Hampshire. In 1858, the state legislature granted a charter for a 99-foot-wide right of way to the summit. Marsh was not the first to use a cog, also called a rack-and-pinion

The Cog Railway's engine lies overturned after hitting a misplaced mechanism on the sidetrack. Out of sight, the passenger car lies crashed. The accident killed 8 people and hurt 70. It's unknown why the police circled the rocks on the right side of the photo.
NEW HAMPSHIRE STATE POLICE

Police investigators peer at the stilled passenger car where it landed. NEW HAMPSHIRE STATE POLICE

system, on a railway. The first cog railway, designed and patented by John Blenkinsop,, began running in 1811 in England. Marsh modified that system for climbing a mountain.

A cog is simply a wheel with teeth on it that engages a special center rack between the two load-bearing rails. This center rack is open to allow snow and ice to fall out. The cogwheels get the train cars up steep grades without derailing. A railway is the same thing as a railroad: a system of track the train runs on. In terms of usage, railroad is more common in the United States and railway in other nations. A cog railway steam train consists of three parts: a locomotive or engine, a tender, and a car. The cog engines and cars are not connected. The car is always on the uphill side: On the way up, the engine is pushing the car; on the way down, the car rests on the engine as it slowly goes down. During the descent, a brakeman in the car helps control the speed, especially at the sidings.*

* Sidings are short sections of track where trains can pull off to let another pass. The Cog Railway formerly had two sidings, one of them a complicated nine-movement switch high on the mountain called Skyline Switch, the location of the 1967 accident.

The Mount Washington Cog Railway starts at a location known as the Base Station, at an elevation of 2,700 feet. The railway ascends 3 miles to the 6,288-foot summit of Mount Washington. The railway is technically considered narrow gauge because it is a half-inch shy of the standard gauge railway measurement of 4 feet, 8½ inches. The point of maximum grade, 37 percent, is located on elevated tracks at the site called Jacob's Ladder.

By 1967, at nearly a century old, the Cog Railway advertised it had never had an accident in which a passenger was killed (although a worker had died in 1929). A 1960s-era brochure promised: "The cog rail is securely bolted to the cross ties of the road and into play with perfect security [with] the heavy toothed wheels under the engine. Each locomotive has two pairs of cylinders, each operating independently of the other on its own cogwheel. There are also two cogwheels on the cars and large friction brakes of great power so that the cars can be stopped independently of the engine. The various safety devices make the descent equally as safe as the ascent."

Only twice before 1967 had the Cog encountered accidents. The first was when the original Engine 1, Old Peppersass, climbed the tracks for the New

The Cog Railway climbs the steep pitch called Jacob's Ladder in 1895. HENRY G. PEABODY/ LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

England Governors' Conference at the Mount Washington Hotel on July 29, 1929. The front axle broke, and the train began to rapidly pick up speed as it descended out of control. Five people were riding, including the engineer and his 16-year-old son, a fireman, and photographers Winston Pote and Daniel Lassiter. Four of the five jumped to the rocks and escaped with broken bones, cuts, and bruises. But for some reason, the railway's photographer, Daniel Lassiter, hung on. The engine derailed at high speed, and he was killed instantly when he landed on the rocks.

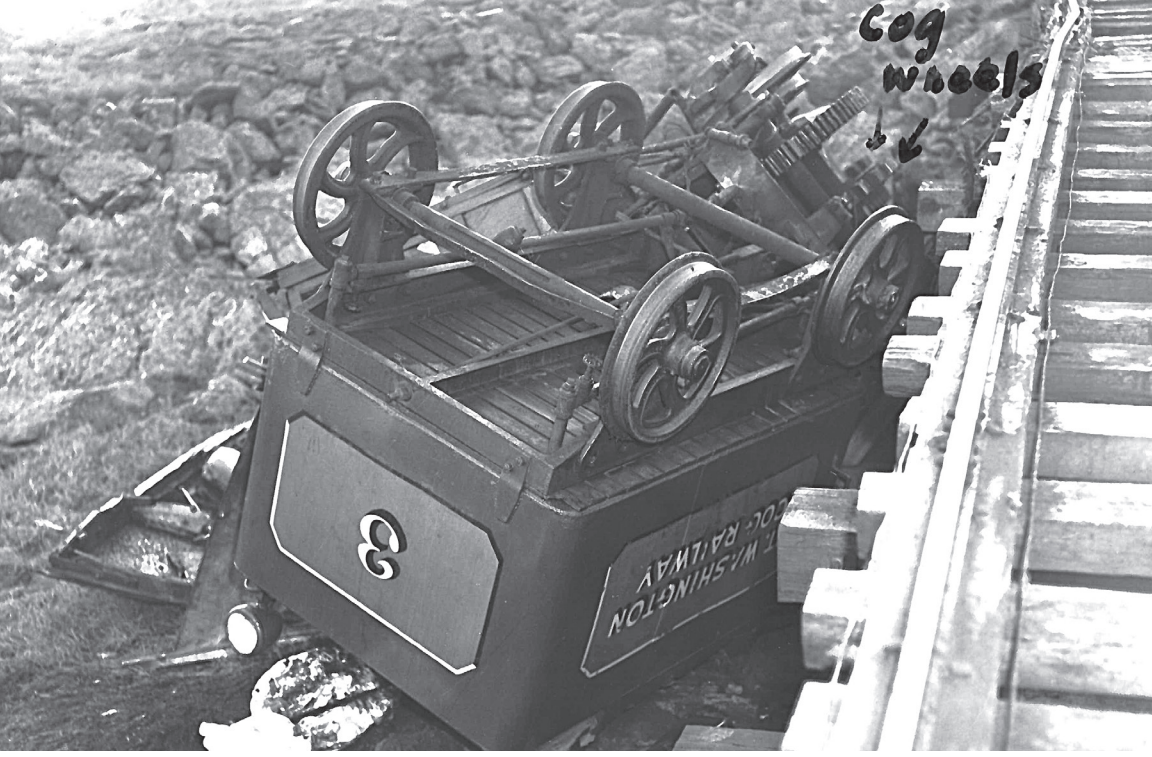
The second serious and less known accident occurred on August 10, 1946. A flat car loaded with garbage broke loose from the summit and collided with an ascending train 600 feet below the summit. Twenty-two people were injured. A reward of $1,000 was offered for finding out who released the brakes on the flat car. Hikers were blamed, and the reward was never claimed, but the cause of the crash probably was crew member error: not securing the flat car on an especially windy day.

The Accident

September 17, 1967, was a warm and relatively calm day. It was a Sunday, and the last train of the day, the Sunset, was leaving the summit at 5:10 P.M. The locomotive was called Number 3 Base Station, and it pushed a new aluminum car named Chumley 11 after one of its designers. The engineer, Gordon Chase, 56, of Lincoln, New Hampshire, supervised Charles Kenison, 18, of Jefferson, New Hampshire. The fireman was Guilliaem "Rusty" Aertsen (whose age was not recorded; he was in his 20s), who was responsible for feeding a ton of coal into the engine each trip. Also in the engine was Peter Carter of Jefferson, an off-duty brakeman who turned 20 that day. He sat up front because the car was overloaded. Carter was riding with his girlfriend, Julia Swenson, on the last train of the day because he was waiting for his brother—the train's brakeman, Nathan Carter, 23—to finish work.

The capacity of the new car was 56 passengers. Nathan Carter stated in the accident report that just before leaving, all of the seats were filled and another 25 passengers plus two crew members were standing—a total of 83 people in the car—at the time of the accident.

The fatal spot, Skyline Switch and Siding, was located a little less than a mile below the summit, at an elevation of 5,600 feet. The switch and siding were removed several years ago. The historic Westside Trail, built by J. Rayner



The engine called Number 3 Base Station and its coal tender (foreground) rest here after flipping off the trestle. NEW HAMPSHIRE STATE POLICE

Edmands, crosses underneath the trestle at Skyline. Gulfside Trail, a section of the Appalachian Trail, runs only 240 feet away from Skyline.

In his report, Aertsen, the fireman, stated that he looked to make sure the rails were OK as the train descended toward Skyline Switch and that the switch points were in the proper position.

The young trainee engineer, Kenison, had only started working for the railway a few weeks earlier, on August 27. From his position on that fatal day, he examined and determined the line was clear at Skyline Switch. He also stated that visibility was good, with "some dusty fog" at the time.

Chase, the head engineer, had previously been fired, apparently for a lax attitude toward safety. When interviewed by investigators in the hospital in Berlin, New Hampshire, he said he'd looked ahead at the switch before passing through it and hadn't seen anything in the path of the train. But something was in the way: The locomotive hit it. Immediately, Chase and Kenison grabbed for the hand brakes.

According to published accounts, Peter Carter "felt the locomotive bounce in the air and return again to the trestle." He watched Chase and Kenison

apply the hand brakes and felt the engine slow, but then the car seemed to bump into the engine, pushing them off the trestle.

Nathan Carter believed the train was descending at normal speed before it entered the switch. After they passed over the switch, he saw the engine "pop up and down." It pulled away and flipped off the trestle. He applied the brake and thought the car would stop, but it soon picked up speed. He estimated it reached 20 to 40 MPH when it finally left the trestle. He suffered a shoulder dislocation.

What did the train hit? Accident investigators found a section of flip rail—a short, steel, hinged rail that supported cars as they moved on or off the track at Skyline Switch—lying across the cog rack* at an angle of 9 degrees.

This section of flip rail was 5 feet, 4¾ inches long and when set for the siding projected 2½ inches above the cog rack. The locomotive cogwheel struck the flip rail, bending it about two inches out of line; meanwhile, the engine was lifted up, to the right, and out of the cog rack and main rails. This rendered the cogwheel and brakes useless. The locomotive and coal tender

The passenger car called Chumley II sits crumpled after it careened out of control and crashed into rocks high on Mount Washington. NEW HAMPSHIRE STATE POLICE

* The cog rack is the ladder-like apparatus that runs up the center of the track, with openings into which the cog fits so that the train can be controlled.

continued down the trestle, out of control, for about 68 feet until tipping off the trestle.

The overfilled passenger car rolled past the overturned locomotive and gained speed until it flipped off the trestle about 516 feet from where it had derailed at Skyline Switch. Many people jumped out of the car as it tumbled. The car fell a couple of feet to the rocks below, but because of the speed and weight, it slid for about 60 feet until it hit a large jagged rock.

Peter Carter was lightly pinned in the overturned locomotive. Once he freed himself and colleagues, he raced down to the badly damaged car. Julia Swenson was shaken up but not seriously injured. She originally had been sitting in the front right seat but had given up her seat to a couple, both of whom died. In the midst of chaos, Swenson and Peter Carter tried to help the injured and dying passengers.

The Aftermath

Word of the accident was communicated by track phone from the scene to the ticket office at Base Station. At the time, the only outside telephone line from the Base Station ran to the summit. The track phone was a crude affair: two wires running along the tracks, connecting military-surplus field telephones. Radios were not in general use then.

Greg Gordon, age 21, was working at the Mount Washington Observatory on the summit. This was his first two-week stint gathering weather data. He was making dinner when John Davis, a state park employee who was working at the Tip-Top House, came rushing over to say the Cog had crashed and that he would be heading down to help. Gordon turned off the oven, gathered first-aid supplies, and hastened down the tracks on foot. He was the second person on the scene.

Gordon saw the locomotive on its side and realized that the crew was pretty banged up. He came across a man sitting still on the trestle. "I asked him if he was OK, and he replied that he broke his leg," Gordon later said. The man had decided to try jumping off the back of the car as it left the tracks. He'd landed on the tracks, and one leg went between the ties. Gordon soon found more passengers who had jumped from the out-of-control car. All of them had broken bones from hitting the rocks.

Dr. Francis M. Appleton, a Concord physician, happened to be visiting the summit. He followed the other rescuers down to the accident scene. An Observatory staffer, probably Charlie Haggart, who was also working

on the summit, contacted emergency personnel, including fire, police, and ambulances. Meanwhile, another train was coming up the mountain to relieve the Sunset of its overloaded car. It arrived on the scene with a handful of other passengers.

The news soon reached the AMC's Pinkham Notch Camp, where I was working, having just arrived from a summer job on trails in Vermont. I was cleaning up dishes from the guests' dinner when I heard the Cog had derailed. I ran to my room, grabbed my pack and a headlamp, and joined others loading supplies on a truck. We had a cache of military-surplus Stokes litters, or wire cots that could be used to safely transport accident victims.

Bill Arnold was working that summer as an assistant hutmaster. He was on his way to spend the evening at his family camp in Randolph when he stopped at a gas station in Gorham to fill up his Corvair. He saw ambulances heading toward Pinkham Notch and asked what was going on. He immediately turned around and went back to Pinkham, where the crew was loading first-aid supplies onto two trucks. Bruce Sloat, AMC's huts manager, was directing AMC's response.

We drove the heavily laden trucks up the Mount Washington Auto Road, stopping periodically to prevent the engines from overheating. We finally made it to the section near the top called Home Stretch. This was the site of a former Air Force test station, and we were directed by Forest Service personnel to park there and take the shortcut over to Gulfside Trail. We were told to take blankets but not litters. We lashed the blankets onto our packboards and made our way over to Gulfside Trail. There, we met another ranger who said that yes, they did need litters, too. So a few of us returned for the Stokes litters while the others hurried down to the wreck.

We lashed several litters together and used slings to help carry the heavy load. Once we reached the tracks, we slid the litters down to the accident scene at Skyline Switch. Bill Arnold told me, "I saw what had happened. A rail was across the Cog track, and it was all bent and it looked like it was damaged when the train ran over it."

By then it was dark, and the smell of coal and the moans of the injured met us at the wreck scene. The passenger car had traveled about 500 feet past where the locomotive had derailed and tumbled off the trestle. The injured were scattered around, calling out to us. Appleton was treating them. We helped him patch them up as best we could, lifted them onto the litters, and carefully moved the litters into the railroad car that had arrived from below.

Gordon, the Observatory worker, had gone back to the summit for more supplies. When he returned, he found our AMC crew and others from the Auto Road and the local television station WMTW all there. The horror of the crash was starting to seem real. "What struck me was that people had tried to climb out of the windows as the car was speeding down the trestle, out of control," Gordon later said. "The car reached a curve, and the car flipped and rolled on top of those people, and they were crushed between the rocks and the car. I remember that the front right side of the car was crushed and that an elderly man was crushed and still inside the car."

Arnold, Gordon, some other rescuers, and I finished loading the injured into the recently arrived train. Some passengers who were lightly injured refused to get onto the rescue train, but New Hampshire State Trooper Robert Loven ordered them on. We watched as the train departed to Base Station.

The Dead

Arnold and the others of us from AMC were soon directed to line up the eight bodies. As we gathered blankets to cover them, my headlamp illuminated a young boy's body. It took me a very long time afterward to get this sight out of my mind.

Arnold told me later, "Seeing a deceased 3-year-old little girl—and I had a nephew that age—it bothered me a lot."

Peter Carter, who had stayed to help, said, "I remember seeing the headlights of ambulances on the Base Station Road on the way down. The weather was warm, and it could have been a lot worse if the conditions were not as mild."

The mountain was eerily quiet once the flat car carrying the dead had left for Base Station. The accident scene was littered with clothing, purses, eyeglasses, and even false teeth. Two U.S. Forest Service rangers, Casey Hodgdon and Rene LaRoche, stayed behind to guard the scene. State Trooper Loven and a conservation officer helped gather up the personal effects of the passengers and joined the rangers for the long night on the mountain.

Four trains transported the injured and dead down the mountain. The first arrived at Base Station just after 7 P.M. with the passengers still standing. The second trainload of injured passengers arrived at 8:50, the third at 10:40. The flat car with the dead reached Base Station at 12:29 A.M.

One of the lessons learned from this tragic accident was that the triage, or sorting of patients, should have occurred at Base Station. Instead, almost

all of the patients were brought to the Littleton Hospital, about a half-hour away, where teams of doctors and nurses worked to determine levels of injury. In retrospect, according to Appleton, this effort should have been done closer to the scene so that patients could have been sent to area hospitals prepared to handle the wide severity of cases.

From Littleton, patients were sent to hospitals in Conway, Berlin, Hanover, and Whitefield, New Hampshire, and St. Johnsbury, Vermont. Ambulances from all over the region were called into service. The dead were taken to the Pillsbury Funeral Home in Littleton, where the garage was set up as a morgue so that state police could identify the deceased.

Arnold spent the night at the Mount Washington Observatory to help answer phone calls coming in from all over, seeking details on the accident. He didn't sleep much that night. The next morning, he hiked back down to the accident site with coffee and doughnuts for those guarding it.

On the way back to the summit, Arnold met Governor John King and a state police trooper who were walking down to see where the train had crashed. A few hours later, King returned to the Observatory, where he asked Arnold if anything was needed. Arnold replied that he needed to get back to work at Pinkham Notch—could he have a ride? He was covered with coal dust and grime. The governor said, "Get in," and they drove him to Pinkham Notch. I just about dropped my jaw on the floor at Pinkham when, who walks into the old Trading Post but Bill Arnold, accompanied by Governor King and the trooper.

A Tough Year for the Cog Railway

Jack Middleton, a Philadelphia-area native, spent summers in the late 1930s in Maine and New Hampshire, where he developed a love of the mountains and outdoors. "My parents wanted me to get away from the polio outbreaks," he told me. He'd worked for AMC in the late 1940s and for the Observatory in the early 1950s. After he served in the U.S. Marines during the Korean War, he graduated from Boston University Law School. By 1967, Middleton was a 38-year-old lawyer representing the Cog Railway. In 1962, Henry Teague, then-owner of the Cog Railway, had died and left the Cog Railway to Dartmouth College. Colonel Arthur Teague (no relation to Henry Teague) bought the railway from Dartmouth in 1961, and Middleton served as a lawyer on the legal transaction. Middleton recalled, "After the sale closed, Arthur asked me to stay on as attorney for the Cog Railway, and I was honored to do so."

Colonel Teague was a highly decorated World War II hero and served as a battalion commander on Utah Beach at the 1944 D-Day landings in Normandy. Colonel Teague led his men from the beach, and they fought their way through German lines to link up with paratroopers who had landed four miles inland. Teague later married Ellen Crawford, a nurse from Philadelphia. They had three children together.

Arthur Teague was cost-conscious and managed the railway with skill but limited resources. He did not purchase liability insurance during the first five years. He felt it was too expensive.

As Middleton recalled, 1967 "was a tough year for the Teague family. Their house at the Base Station burned down in November 1965. Just as the 1967 season was about to commence, the state of New Hampshire would not allow the Cog to open the leased Summit House due to various issues, and this caused a big drop in business. This upset Arthur greatly and he had a couple of heart attacks over the stress. Finally on August 4, 1967, he took his deer rifle and shot himself in the head."

Middleton added, "Earlier that day, the Board of Directors met and discussed the liability insurance issue. Ellen Teague gave the go-ahead to purchase a policy, and the Board approved this. After the meeting, I accompanied Ellen Teague and the Cog accountant over to Lunenburg, Vermont, where the Teagues had just bought a home to replace the one destroyed by fire. We drove back to the Base Station in the afternoon, and there was great commotion going on. An employee by the name of Jitney Lewis rushed over and said the colonel had just shot himself."

A second major tragedy happened exactly two weeks later, when the Teagues' daughter Lucy was killed in an auto rollover accident in Tilton, on her way to a horse show. Lucy was buried next to her father.

Somehow, in all of this tragedy, the Teagues went ahead with buying a $100,000 liability insurance policy for the railway from the New Hampshire Insurance Company. Middleton recalled, "We added another 1-million-dollar umbrella coverage plan with the Saint Paul Fire and Marine Insurance Company." They thus had coverage just before the accident.

Without the insurance, the Cog Railway Corporation would have been put out of business. "We settled all of the claims and nearly exhausted the $1.1 million coverage," Middleton said. "Only one case went to the federal district court, and that was settled after one or two days in court. It is hard to imagine how 1.1 million dollars would cover 8 fatalities and over 70 injured today."

On the afternoon of September 17, 1967, Middleton had been on the summit with his family. They hiked down the Jewell Trail and arrived back at Base Station around 3 P.M. and headed home. It was a beautiful day. A few hours later, Middleton got the call from Ellen Teague, gathered a suitcase, and drove back. He arrived as a flatbed was bringing down some of the casualties.

"The next morning I went up and saw the wreck," he said. "There was clothing and things strewn everywhere. It was everyone's opinion that part of the Skyline Switch rail was lying over the Cog track and that this caused the derailment. We did not know who did it, but our defense was that a hiker could have done it. We had a witness from a previous train who said that the switch was properly set when he saw it earlier. Regardless, it was the responsibility of the crew to check that the switch was clear, and something happened and it was not checked. There was no escape from liability."

Middleton went on: "On October 4, 1967, we were given a set of instructions from the PUC [New Hampshire Public Utilities Commission] after it was determined the cause was human error. Ellen Teague wanted to get the Cog running as soon as possible and not to shut down and have the case linger over the winter. I think it was a good idea to get the trains running again for another few weeks, until the season ended."

The railway did operate again. Because the cause of the accident was attributed to human or crew error, the PUC required the railway to adopt and follow a set of safety regulations:

1. Trains ascending the mountain must stop before passing over any switch, following which the brakeman shall examine the switch, and the train will proceed upon his motion only after he is satisfied that it is properly set.
2. All descending trains shall stop before passing over any switch, and both engineer and fireman shall make a physical inspection, acknowledging to each other that it is safe for passage and that passage through the same be made at very slow speed not to exceed 1½ miles per hour.
3. The brakeman, while ascending the mountain, shall be stationed in the forward end of the car in a position to observe and ascertain that the Cog rack, rail, and structure is in normally safe condition without obstruction.
4. The descending trains, while under way, shall have a qualified engineer and fireman in their proper positions in the locomotive and

a qualified brakeman at the brake control in the car with no other duties to perform.

The Official Cause

In a press release five days after the accident, the PUC announced its findings:

1. It is our conclusion that the cause of the accident was human error and not due to any structural or mechanical deficiency of the railroad.
2. It has been established beyond doubt that the switch at the Skyline Station was not in the proper position at the time of the mishap. It is our conclusion that it was the duty of the crew of the involved train to notice this fact and to stop the train prior to its entering the switch.
3. While the train crew responsible for changing the switch insists that the switch was properly closed by them, and while conjecture has been raised that possibly a hiker changed the position of the switch afterward, we can come to no positive conclusion as to the exact facts of the matter in this preliminary investigation.
4. It is our conclusion that there was no relationship between the number of people on the train and the cause of the accident.
5. It is our conclusion that the braking capacity of both the engine and the passenger car were more than adequate to stop the train had the cog not been disengaged from the rack.

The Search for a Reason

The Cog's owner, Ellen Teague, believed that someone on foot had vandalized the tracks, placing the flip rail over the center rack rail, causing the derailment. Cog owners also had blamed a hiker for the 1946 accident, when a flat car loaded with garbage at the summit rolled down the mountain and collided with an ascending train, seriously injuring two dozen people. No hiker has ever come forward, nor was any evidence ever found that hikers caused either wreck. In any case, it was the duty of the crew to safely operate the engine, regardless of who left the flip rail in the wrong position.

The Preliminary Accident Report by PUC's transportation director, Winslow Melvin, concluded, "The immediate cause of the derailment was the location of the 5 foot section of flip rail. The failure of those on the engine to notice this, in view of the fact that they looked at it as the train approached

is very difficult to explain. Had it been noticed and the train stopped before striking it, the accident would not have occurred."

Hindsight

I've come up with this list of possible reasons the crew missed seeing the flip rail:

- Blockage of view: The tender preceded the engine downhill, and the engineer or the trainee engineer did not look out the window around the tender.
- Blinding sun: The sun was low in the sky. The train crashed at 5:30 P.M. Official sunset for September 17, 1967, in Carroll, New Hampshire, was at 6:54 P.M. The estimated time for sunset at Skyline Switch was several minutes later. Did the sun angle blind the view of the engineer or the trainee engineer?
- Lack of attention: This was the last train of the day. Is it possible the crew was not paying attention? There were four crew members in the engine. Could they have distracted one another?
- Speed: Was the trainee engineer going too fast and unable to react before hitting the flip rail? There was no data recorder to reveal the answer.
- Possible incompetence: Some have questioned why the engineer, Gordon Chase, continued to work after he had been fired. According to Joseph McQuaid's book, *Cog Days: A Boy's Life and One Tragic Summer on Mt. Washington* (Plaidswede Publishing, 2017), Chase might not have been qualified for his job. He was described in the book as "heedless of safety concerns."

Per Ellen Teague's desire, the Cog restarted service in early October. Glen Kidder wrote in *Railway to the Moon* (Courier Print Co., 1969), "Both the coach and engine suffered comparatively little damage and were repaired and restored to normal operating conditions and are again back in service." The locomotive that crashed, Number 3 Base Station, was renamed No. 3 Agiocochook and ran for several years. It's now in storage.

Ellen Teague faced an enormously challenging year. She had to run the Cog after its worst accident, and following two family tragedies. But her

husband's suicide, her daughter's death, and the derailment did not change the fact that people still wanted to ride the trains.

The accident investigation was still underway, but she decided to get the trains running as soon as she could get approval from the Public Utility Commission. The commission gave conditional approval on October 5, 1967, and the loudspeaker at Base Station proclaimed, "The Mount Washington Cog Railway is now running and will operate for the rest of the season." Ellen felt that if the trains did not run that year, the Cog might never operate again, given the dark cloud hanging over it.

The first train to operate following the accident carried members of the Public Utility Commission and the press and left Base Station at 11:45 A.M. October 5. A second train with paying passengers left ten minutes later. The PUC meeting minutes do not disclose whether there was an incident involving the second train, but that train did not arrive on the summit until about an hour after the first.

An investigation into the unexplained delay revealed that the second car's improperly adjusted brake cable got caught on a rail at Skyline Switch. It was discovered that some recent mechanical work on the braking system had not met the tolerances required. The cable was removed, and the car operated with only one brake to the summit and back to Base Station. This incident—not made public at the time—is a jarring reminder of what had happened a few weeks earlier at Skyline Switch.

The complicated and troublesome Skyline Switch designed in 1941 was removed about five years ago. A second switch lower on the mountain, known as Waumbek Switch, was replaced in 2004 and supported by a new 1,800-foot-long passing loop that is electrically and hydraulically operated. This modern design operates the switch mechanism with a battery charged by solar panels. The loop allows ascending and descending trains to safely pass each other—and allows more trips, and more passengers, to the summit.

To the delight of steam enthusiasts, the Mount Washington Cog Railway continues to use one coal-fired steam engine. Each run of that engine consumes a ton of coal and about 1,000 gallons of water. Several other Cog engines, built locally, are powered by cleaner bio-diesel (B-20) that contains up to 20 percent plant-based fuel and burns only 18 gallons of fuel on a round trip.

The Mount Washington Cog Railway was purchased in 1983 by a group of local New Hampshire businessmen. Then, in 1986, Wayne Presby and

Joel Bedor bought it, and their families ran it together until last year, when the Bedors sold out to the Presbys. In late 2016, Presby announced plans to build a seasonal hotel near the site of the accident, at 5,600 feet of elevation. Opposition to the proposal mounted as discussions with Coos County planning officials continued. As of late summer 2017, no formal proposal had been filed but the plans and a petition were posted at Base Station. The Cog carried 110,000 passengers in 2016. In 2018, the Cog expects to celebrate 150 years.

This story is dedicated to those who lost their lives or were injured on September 17, 1967, and to their rescuers, both volunteer and professional.

Editor's note: Govatski is a founding member of a citizens' group called Keep the Whites Wild, which opposes a hotel on the railway's former Skyline Switch site. In summer 2017, the railway posted a drawing and description of a future hotel and asked riders to sign a petition. For more, see Ian Crouch's August 25, 2017, article in AMC Outdoors *magazine, "Proposed Cog Railway Hotel Sparks Debate," available online at outdoors.org/coghotel.*

David Govatski retired from a career with the U.S. Forest Service and lives with his wife in Jefferson, New Hampshire. He can see the scene of the accident from his home. His most recent article for this journal was on the Great Gulf Wilderness, in the Winter/Spring 2015 issue.